

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 221 231

JC 820 286

AUTHOR Cohen, Arthur M.
TITLE Update on Research on the Humanities in Community Colleges.
PUB DATE 26 Feb 82
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the "Strengthening the Humanities in Occupational Education" Conference (Los Angeles, CA, February 26, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Advisory Committees; Articulation (Education); College Curriculum; Community Colleges; Community Services; *Curriculum Development; Developmental Studies Programs; *Humanities; *Interdisciplinary Approach; *Liberal Arts; Student Personnel Services; Two Year Colleges; *Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

Recent research and trends in the humanities are discussed in terms of their implications for community colleges. First, initial results of a survey of students in Washington community colleges are outlined, including the findings that 46% of the students attended the colleges straight from high school and that the more liberal arts courses the students had taken, the more confident they were in their abilities. The paper then discusses another project involving six of the largest community college districts in the United States. The project has seven major areas of concern: (1) strengthening the humanities in community services; (2) promoting advisory committees to humanities programs; (3) developing interdisciplinary humanities courses; (4) promoting integrated developmental education programs; (5) building support services into regular credit courses; (6) strengthening articulation between community colleges and high schools; and (7) developing liberal arts career options. An update on developments in each of these areas is presented, along with observations and recommendations stressing the need to avoid creating separate departments for developmental education; the necessity for humanities faculty to visit local high schools to recruit students; the difficulty of setting up interdisciplinary courses; the need to retain poorly prepared students in humanities courses; and the benefits of integrating support services with classroom assignments as part of regular courses. (HB)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

Arthur M. Cohen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

☐ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official NIE
position or policy.

PRESENTATION TO STRENGTHENING THE HUMANITIES IN
OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE

LOS ANGELES, FEBRUARY 26, 1982

UPDATE ON RESEARCH ON THE HUMANITIES IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

ARTHUR M. COHEN

Your interest in the humanities in community colleges is evidenced by your participation in this conference. Judith Jeffrey Howard, your conference coordinator, has done her usual excellent job in bringing together people from all parts of the west and midwest to discuss the latest developments in bringing the humanities together with occupational education in their own institutions. You are discussing matters of significance to you, your colleagues, your students, and your institutions. For many of you this is the second or third time you have attended one of these conferences. Hence it also represents a progress report for you and the chance to become reacquainted with your like-minded colleagues in other institutions.

My role today is to bring you up to date on some of the research and trends in humanities in community colleges. My colleagues and I at the ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges and the Center for the Study of Community Colleges have been tracking this important curriculum area for the past seven years. We can report progress in some directions, no movement in others. But we continue to toil, combining research with advocacy so that the humanities, and, indeed, all the liberal arts not be further weakened in community colleges.

Our most recent work has been a continuation of the project with the Washington State Board for Community College Education. Just this fall we completed a survey of students in Washington community colleges

ED221231

JC 820 286

and the data are still being analyzed. First results indicate that the median age in Washington is under 22, just as it is nationwide. The community college's leadership may be fond of citing the mean age, 29, but the median reveals that half your students still come to you directly out of high school or with only a year or two intervening. Not incidentally, the California Statewide Longitudinal Study confirmed these figures: 46 percent of the students just out of high school and another 16 percent indicating high school as their last institution attended.

One of the more interesting findings in the Washington survey is that the liberal arts courses seem to have the desired results. We asked students how confident they were in their abilities to speak effectively, write, understand their heritage and other cultural perspective, and so on--the traditional goals of the liberal arts. Then we analyzed the data according to the number of courses the students had taken in different areas. We checked for students who had taken no liberal arts courses, one course, or two or more, and found that the more courses taken, the more confident those students were in their abilities. We did the same for people who had taken business courses and found that the more business courses they had taken, the less confident they were in those abilities that represent the expected outcomes of liberal arts courses. Nothing startling there perhaps, but it does offer a little more to throw on the side of those arguments holding that the liberal arts do indeed teach.

Another project, just begun last fall, involves us with six of the largest community college districts in the nation. Here we are doing

some research and more advocacy, helping the districts maintain the liberal arts and transfer education. We have developed seven areas of concern with which we are working with the districts and on which we are still conducting research.

One area is the humanities in community services. Our prior studies have shown that the community service directors operate their community and continuing education programs as though they were princes with their own territories. Few of the faculty teaching the regular credit courses have anything to do with them. In case studies of twenty colleges done in 1978 this characteristic of community education became apparent. More recently, in an attempt to check trends, a UCLA student did a dissertation in which she assessed the strength of the humanities in community service programs in eight Southern California colleges. I am not pleased to report that she found the same tendencies: the community service directors have little to do with the regular humanities instructors. Few instructors know or care about what is going on the community service programs; few community service directors ever consider discussing program directions or presentations with the humanities instructors.

Some progress is being made in integrating the humanities with occupational programs. That is the theme of this entire conference and I would not presume to give additional reports on it. Several studies are available in the ERIC system reporting what people have done in merging the humanities and occupational education. Gayle Byock and Jim Palmer are here to show you how readily those studies may be retrieved from the data base. A good measure of what has happened in that direction may be attributed to the interest shown by you and your counterparts and because of the Endowment's ability to fund worthy projects in that area.

We have long been promoting advisory committees to the humanities programs and there seems steady progress in that area. We have available for you a monograph written by Florence Brawer and Alan Gates, the latter the person who effected the advisory committee to the humanities program at Clark Community College in Washington. Three such committees are operating in Washington, others in California, Florida, and Ohio. We have a videotape available for distribution in which the prime movers in such committees discuss how they formed them. The tape includes testimony from some of the citizen members. A UCLA student just this week defended a dissertation in which she recounted her experiences in steering the formation of such a committee through the San Diego Community College District. The dissertation is written in a readable form and will be available for distribution soon.

Interdisciplinary courses are making some strides in the humanities but the pace is slow. It is difficult to put together interdisciplinary courses. Faculty members must trust each other and be able to work together in a fashion that many of them have never tried. Further, the faculty fear losing enrollments in their specialized courses. And, indeed, enrollment surveys show that during the first couple of years after a interdisciplinary course in the humanities is established and publicized, the students take it as their humanities requirement, staying away from the specialized courses in philosophy, anthropology, and so on. It is possible that as that course matures it can be used as a recruiting mechanism for students to take additional courses in the humanities but initially it seems not to operate that way.

Literacy development bodes to be the general education of the 1980's in community colleges. For that reason we are quite concerned with developmental education. The liberal arts suffer most when students cannot read, write, and think critically. The poor preparation revealed by students coming into the colleges in recent years has been one input into the decline in the study of the humanities. For all of these reasons we feel that the humanities faculty should be concerned with the study of literacy. And of course most of them are.

Our own concern with developmental education can be summarized by recounting our position on two controversial areas within it. First, we believe that developmental education studies should not be presented through a separate department. That breeds separateness between the transfer studies and the studies of literacy and weakens both. Too few students come to community colleges prepared to study the humanities in the traditional form in which they are presented in college level programs. Allowing developmental education to be a separate department or, as some instructors have done, encouraging separation as a way of "getting those students out of my classrooms" weakens transfer education. It may seem anomalous to say that removing the poor students weakens your courses but it does. There are just not enough of the better students to go around. Taking out the poor students leads eventually to such small enrollments in the humanities courses that the courses themselves fall into jeopardy. That is why fewer specialized courses in the humanities are being offered now than they were at the beginning of the 1970's. It is impossible to maintain sufficient enrollment to fill specialized humanities classes if the poorer students are barred from taking at least the introductory courses.

The second reason for promoting integrated developmental education is that it encourages students to seek the assistance they need. Left to their own devices, students will not take advantage of the support services that the colleges have available for them. Last year we surveyed the students in the Los Angeles Community College district and, among other things, asked them how confident they were in their ability to read and write in a fashion that would allow them to complete the course in which they were enrolled. We asked also if they had participated in any of the ancillary activities offered by the college: the learning laboratories, tutorial centers, special counseling programs, and so on. If they had not, we asked them why not. Of those students who said they were not confident in their abilities, less than one-fourth had ever sought out any of the named activities. Here were students who recognized that they were weak in the three R's but who did not, of their own volition, take advantage of the support services that the colleges offered. When asked why not, they said they did not have time, nobody asked them to go, they did not think the services would be helpful.

The use of support services must be built into your regular credit courses. Students can be required to participate. Just as the science instructors have for years required the laboratory as part of the science courses, the humanities instructors can require a set amount of time in the reading laboratory as part of the courses that they teach. They can work together with the people who operate the supportive activities in selecting programs that fit their own courses. There is an effect on a student when an instructor says, "Next week is a quiz on the material covered in Chapter 6. If you want to do well on the quiz, go to the learning laboratory and check out this named program." There is a more

powerful effect if the instructor says on the the first day of class, "As a condition of staying in this class throughout this term, you will meet three hours a week in the learning laboratory. They will take roll here just as I do here. They will give you instructional materials that are keyed to this course." Left to their own, students do not participate. Integrating support services with classroom assignments would be salutary.

We are recommending closer articulation between community colleges and secondary schools. In the early years of the community college when the institutions were more closely connected with the secondary schools, this integration was natural. Secondary school teachers taught the junior college courses and the carry-over was obvious. In this past generation, since that connection has been broken, the community colleges have tended to turn their backs on the secondary schools and attempt closer course articulation with the universities. Yet it seems untoward for that connection to have been broken. Fewer than five percent of the students complete two years at the community college and transfer to the university; more than 50 percent of them come to the community college within a year or two of graduation from the neighboring high schools. Course articulation should be built between the community colleges and the high schools.

In our studies of the humanities faculty nationwide we asked, "Have you ever gone into a local secondary school to plan courses in your area or to recruit students to your own programs?" Ten percent of the faculty said that they had. That situation must be corrected. A weak humanities program at a secondary school will not lead to a strong humanities program in the community college. The community college instructors can help the secondary school faculty define expectations for the students.

Students can be recruited from the secondary schools into the humanities courses at the community colleges. Advanced placement can be undertaken. Much activity in these areas has already been undertaken by Miami-Dade Community College on one side of the continent and by the University of California, the California State College and University System, and the California Community Colleges on the other.

Our last area of concern is for a liberal arts career option. This is a program in which students are selected, tracked through a special sequence of liberal arts courses, and prepared for entry positions in business and agencies in their community for which highly specialized training is not necessary. The students who come into such a program would be those who are not going to be nurses or X-ray technologists. They are going to enter the world of work in banks, insurance companies, stockbrokerage houses, service industries, international trade, shops, restaurants, department stores--all those areas of employment where employers have been for years complaining that they cannot find entry level people who possess the rudimentary skills that they once could depend on as being held by high school graduates. The employers want people who can read, write, understand what is going on around them, get along with their fellows, speak to clients with good effect, follow instructions, understand written and verbal communication--the traditional general education liberal arts goals. The high school diploma has lost its credibility; the associate in arts degree is next unless students can be deliberately tracked into those types of jobs and can demonstrate the skills needed by people who can learn the specialities of their work on the job.

The program would include selective entry for young people out of high school, a sequence of liberal arts courses, a cooperative work experience component. It would be set up and managed by the liberal arts instructors who would effect a liaison with the cooperative work experience director so that students could be placed and given work experience credit. There would need to be a citizens advisory committee to that program, a committee made up of prominent employers in the community who could make billets available for students in their own organizations and thus show the way to smaller businessmen's involvement.

The liberal arts career option has made little headway, possibly because it is a new idea, probably because it takes a great amount of work to set up. Humanities instructors are simply not used to getting out of their classroom, working with each other, working with faculty in other departments to sequence courses, discussing involvements with a cooperative work experience director whom they have never met, building a lay advisory committee, and so on. This program demands a great amount of care and leadership on the part of a president, dean, or department chairperson with high dedication.

Over the next few years we will be pursuing these seven areas of specific advocacy with the six districts. We will also continue our studies and research on the national scene. We are pleased to be part of your own work and we look forward to further association with you.

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges
96 Powell Library Building
University of California
Los Angeles, California 90024